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Memorandum of Proposed Legislation

SUBMITTED BY

THE ALBERTA LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE
INTERNATIONAL RAILWAY BROTHERHOODS

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MEMORANDUM OF PROPOSED LEGISLATION

SUBMITTED BY

THE ALBERTA LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE INTERNATIONAL RAILWAY BROTHERHOODS

The Honourable Premier,
and Members of the Cabinet,
Province of Alberta.

Honorable Sirs:

The Alberta Legislative Committee, International Railway Brotherhoods wish to thank you for the opportunity to submit certain recommendations for proposed Legislative Action.

This is our first formal occasion to meet with and appear before you since you have formed the Government and we would appreciate your fullest consideration and action on the proposals submitted in this brief.

The Railway workers represented by this committee comprise a major portion of the Railway crafts and a significant percentage of the citizens of the Province.

WORKMEN'S COMPENSATION

The traditional method of amending the Alberta Workmen's Compensation Act, by the appointment of a Special Legislative Committee at four year intervals, we feel, is not altogether satisfactory. It's application is uncertain, workmen and their dependents receive their due only by the grace of the legislature when the Act is open for review, and there is a great danger that the required relief may be two or three years late in forthcoming.

We believe that the wage ceiling on earnings, which is considered in computing benefits should be abolished and that benefits should be calculated on the yearly earnings of the wage earner.

Legislation should be enacted at the forthcoming session of the Legislature increasing all Workmen's Compensation benefits, including permanent and partial disability pensions, widows and dependent children's allowances and other special allowances awarded under the act to a level commensurate with the cost of living.

This committee endorses the principal of tying compensation and pension benefits awarded under the Workmen's Compensation Act to the cost of living on an escalator formula, whereby all compensation benefits and pensions would be increased at given intervals as the consumer price index, published by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics increases. We feel that this is eminently fair and just and that such action should not be delayed.

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC ACT

With the greatly increasing amount of tourist traffic on our highways and the corresponding increase in the number of trailers, campers and tent trailers in use, bearing a trailer licence plate which does not relate to the trailer. We request that legislation be introduced governing all such trailers requiring that each trailer be serialized and registered similar to the method of control on motor vehicles. Also that such legislation include provisions that the weight and dimension of such trailer be related to the horsepower of the towing vehicle, in order to eliminate the present hazard on our highways caused by a vehicle towing a trailer too heavy and too large for normal highway speed.

We anticipate that your Government will co-operate with other Provinces to continue the program which will provide a uniform system of traffic light interpretation and highway signs throughout Canada.

We recommend that tractor trailers' width, length and weight, and the number of trailers in any consist not be increased from present regulations.

The general public has been conditioned to the present colors which identify School Buses. We advocate that this identification be used exclusively for School Buses which are in service.

Our present laws respecting traffic in Alberta are considered adequate, however, no legislation is effective unless enforced. The failure of motor vehicle operators to comply with and respect existing laws and regulations continues to be the major cause of accidents and death on our highways.

PROTECTION AT LEVEL CROSSINGS

Due to our interest and experience as railway workers we have on numerous occasions brought to the attention of Provincial Authorities the amount of deaths and injuries caused by accidents occurring at level highway-railway crossings.

In this connection may we again respectfully suggest full participation under the provisions of the Federal Grade Crossing Fund, not only for the elimination of crossings but also for the improvement of vision and the installation of signal protection. Subsection 6 of Section 265 of the Railway Act reads as follows:

> "No amount shall be applied by the Board out of the Grade Crossing Fund towards the cost of work actually done in respect of any crossing unless that crossing has been in existance at least three years prior to making of the Order of the Board to apply the amount for that purpose."

The existance of this subsection, we are convinced, has the effect, of reducing the number of grade separations built. Furthermore, there would appear to be the possibility of money being wasted if after the building of a crossing at grade, an application, followed by approval, was made three years later for grade separation. In the meantime, there is always the possibility of the loss of life and/or serious injury.

We urge your Government to make strong representation to the Federal Authority to have subsection 6 repealed and that discretion be granted the Canadian Transport Commission in considering applications for financial aid from the Fund.

We ask your Government to request the Canadian Transport Commission that Section 277 of the Railway Act be amended so as to require the Railways to erect a chain-link fencing where the Railway Transport Committee deems necessary. This we believe will provide the pedestrian public with a certain degree of protection particularly in the more densely populated areas.

AUTOMOBILE COMPENSATION BOARDS

We wish to reiterate our position and request your government to enact legislation providing for the establishment of an Automobile Compensation Board embodying the "no fault principle" operated by the Government which would be charged with the responsibility of providing a method of assessing the vehicular traffic licensed to operate within the province, and to administer the funds resulting from such assessment to provide the required automobile insurance protection.

We feel that present legislation establishing the minimum amount of automobile insurance that must be carried should also determine the rates that can be charged for such coverage. We are concerned that the so-called Watch Dog committee of the Legislature will not create a sufficient deterrent in control of premium cost.

TRANSPORTATION

The National Transportation Act defines a National transportation policy for Canada. The Canadian Transport Commission is a wholly Federal appointed and controlled body charged with the implementation of this policy.

However many of the decisions reached by this commission have a direct bearing on the citizens of this province. Whenever a passenger train service is reduced or a branch line abandoned within our province solely by permission of the Canadian Transport Commission the immediate effect is a loss of service to our citizens. There is also the distinct possibility that the loss of these services will result in the need for the provision of alternate facilities such as roads which are a direct charge to the people of Alberta.

It is the opinion of this Committee that if the interest of our citizens is to be properly protected, your government should determine a Transportation Policy for the Province of Alberta.

This should embrace all forms of transportation and be fully co-ordinated with those of other provinces and particularly with the national policy. Any such provincial policy should contain a request for Provincial representation on the Canadian Transport Commission, to ensure that the citizens of Alberta have a voice in any decision affecting our province. We feel it would be utter folly to allow any further reduction in rail services until the Canadian Transport Commission has carried out the research which is incumbent upon it under Sec. 15 of the National Transportation Act, and we suggest that such a position should be a part of any provincial Transportation policy you may formulate.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

We would advocate that your Government co-operate with Federal and Provincial Governments to achieve Uniformity of Regulations Governing the Health and Safety of Employees. It is our view that safety Inspectors coming under the jurisdiction of Federal and Provincial Legislation must be highly qualified to perform the necessary inspections to eliminate safety hazards, on the job, in the home and in recreational area.

With the enactment of the Canada Labour (Safety) Code there is for the first time, a general safety Act to ensure safe and healthful working conditions for citizens of our province who work in the Railway Industry.

The Act contemplates and requires co-operation to bring about satisfactory and efficient working of the law. We therefore ask your Government to insure that the fullest co-operation will be extended to the Federal Dept. of Labour in administration of this important Legislation.

We urge your Government to co-operate with Provincial authorities to bring about uniformity in Workmen's Compensation Legislation, in order that the Federal Government adopt the International Labour Organizations Convention on Workmen's Compensation.

EDUCATION

The spiraling cost of Education is of concern to the taxpayer in Alberta. We believe that certain economics could be realized without affecting the quality of education.

We are aware of the studies presently being conducted into aspects of Education in the province of Alberta. We are particularly interested in the feasability of operating the vocational institutes and universities on a year-round basis. We recognize the inherent problems associated with this proposal, however we contend they are not insurmountable.

Besides using the facilities to greater advantage this would result in a valuable side effect in allowing a greater work opportunity for students.

Reports have reached this committee to the effect that many graduates are unable to find employment in their chosen vocation, primarily as a result of too large a number being enrolled in certain faculties. We suggest that a study be commissioned to determine the number of occupational opportunities that will be available in the various professions, on a reasonably long projection.

We are of the opinion that there is a notable lack of industrial and scientific research being conducted in Canada. We therefore recommend that Government and Industry co-operate in the establishment and maintenance of research facilities in the fields of Medicine, Science, Ecology and industrial process of all kinds.

ALBERTA LABOUR ACT

The continuing rising Cost of Living renders the Minimum Wage presently in effect in the Province of Alberta as unrealistic. In many instances the current minimum wage is encouraging people to apply for welfare benefits when such benefits are more favourable than the Minimum Wage offered.

We propose that the minimum wage in Alberta be in excess of the minimum poverty standards as set forth by the Economic Council of Canada.

ECONOMIC SITUATION

Inflation and all its ramifications has been a major economic problem during the past year. The policy of the Federal Government in restraining the economy has resulted in a high rate of unemployment.

Considerable debate has been held about voluntary restraints of both wages and prices. Our position is that these will not work in a free society. In calling for wage restraints it must be pointed out that wages are by no means the only factor contributing to the inflationary problem. We contend that labour must have some assurance that prices and other non-wage forms of income such as salaries, profits, rents, interest, professional fees, unincorporated business income, speculation in real estate, etc., should also be brought under control.

ALBERTA HEALTH CARE

The present means of financing the Alberta Health Care Insurance plan through a premium system is inequitable and has created many administrative problems. We suggest that legislation be introduced at the coming session that would eliminate the premium system and institute financing of the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan through the General Revenue of the Province. Consideration should be given to incorporating the services provided under the Alberta Blue Cross Plan into one complete service under the Alberta Health Care Insurance Commission.

Present Legislation should be amended to allow the so-called deterrent hospital admittance fee be payable by the present Blue Cross Plan. We continue to be concerned with the excessive cost of hearing aid appliances and apparent sharp practice of some distributors in the marketing of such appliances. We suggest that provisions under the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan be made to supply such aids where indicated as necessary by a member of the medical profession.

POLLUTION

All aspects of pollution in our present day environment continues to be of concern to this committee. We affirm our previous position and request that your Government co-operate with other agencies and jurisdictions at all levels of government to obtain a workable and enforceable table of anti-pollution standards applicable on a nation-wide basis. We solicit your government to strictly enforce present regulations to protect the environment.

It is the consensus of opinion that the cost of pollution control and especially the cost of damage to the environment should not

be a burden on the taxpayer but should be a responsibility of the industry creating the pollution.

MARGARINE

We request that in connection with this food commodity that the section of Legislation requiring excessive coloring be repealed. We feel that the use of this product is well established and that the added coloring agent no longer has any value as a deterrent to the use of this product.

RIGHT OF PRIVACY

The Canadian Bar Association recently called upon each Province to enact right of privacy legislation which could be used by a citizen who believes such rights have been violated.

Our committee wishes to add its voice to those requesting legislation to protect the citizens' right to privacy and to have some control over information passed on about him by credit agencies or other bodies. We believe that there is increasing evidence that some data collecting agencies are pushing their activities too far.

We are disturbed by the ever-increasing distribution of unsolicited credit. We recommend that Legislation be enacted to prohibit the distribution of unsolicited credit. To protect the consumer we further request that all credit cards provide for a specimen signature which cannot be erased or defaced.

We urge your government to take every reasonable effort to protect the individual rights and where necessary seek the repeal of those laws which un-necessarily transgress them.

HOUSING

The shortage of adequate, low-cost housing and the efforts made to overcome this situation, continue to be a matter of grave concern to this committee. The cost of renting or buying a house has continued to rise dramatically and shows little promise of levelling off. As in the past, the low income earner remains the most adversely affected and it appears more improbable than ever that he will ever be able to own his own home.

This committee urges the Government to consider and develop the necessary policies to produce the required funds at reasonable rates and at the same time, exhibit careful consideration for the social and environmental aspects of such policies. We are not unmindful of the fact that some of the remedies we are about to suggest may rest with other jurisdictions, but, where they do, we urge your government to seek their co-operation to effect the required ends.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Legislation requiring financial institutions and pension funds to channel a certain proportion of their funds into housing.

Much greater implementation of the principles of municipal assembly of land for housing financed, where necessary, by provincial and Federal subsidies. This, together with a tax on land sales, would tend to hold prices down.

The establishment of a uniform building code for the entire country. We decry the recent efforts by some builders associations for the abolishment of all building codes.

That, for individuals mortgage interest payments on houses be deductible for income tax purposes.

The removal of the Federal and Provincial sales tax on building materials.

The continued emphasis on low rental housing projects but we urge regulations limiting the number of units in such projects and a proviso for park and recreational land in such areas.

REPRESENTATION ON PUBLIC BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

We believe your Government recognizes the value of direct representation of labour on various bodies in the study and administration of measures of vital concern to the large number of citizens who are wage earners.

Our Committee and those we represent offer co-operation with your Government in all matters for which we may have special qualifications.

WATER AND RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

We would welcome a complete review by your Government in all aspects of resources management including export and royalty policy. Many of our members have expressed concern regarding the possible export of our water reserves, we feel strongly that your Government should adopt a policy on this important commodity.

LOTTERIES

This committee has long advocated legal lotteries controlled and operated by the Government, with the money raised by this method allocated to social services. We are concerned that some of the major lotteries being conducted in the province do not contribute to the public welfare. Our proposal is that your Government consider the establishment of Government operated lotteries for social services.

JURY DUTY

We recognize that it is the duty of a person to respond when required to serve on juries. The loss of wages plus expenses involved does create a definite hardship on a wage earner when required to be absent from his or her employment to serve as juror. We request your Government to consider increasing the daily rate for jury duty to not less than the worker's actual daily rate plus reasonable travel and expenses allowances.

REPRESENTATION AT CORONERS INQUESTS

Trade Unions in Alberta are, under present practices, prohibited from appearing as interested parties at coroners' inquests enquiring into the death of workmen. Our Committee feels that, because of their specialized knowledge and training, trade Unions could make significant contribution to such proceedings. The Justice Department of the Province of Quebec recently issued a directive permitting such appearance by unions in that Province. We urge your Government to take similar action.

CONCLUSION

We have put before you as briefly as possible the position of our Committee on some of the resolutions which we, like you receive from the citizens whom we represent. Also we are realistic enough to realize your Government's priorities might be different than ours. However, we would urge you to give earnest consideration to matters raised in this submission. We believe their implementation would be of benefit not only to our membership but the vast majority of the citizens of Alberta.

Respectfully submitted.

C. J. VERHULST, Chairman,
United Transportation Union.

P. LEWKO, Secretary
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers.

P. TISCH, Vice-Chairman,
Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees.

G. F. MAY. Member,
United Transportation Union.

W. G. OWENS,
Transportation Communication Division of
Brotherhood of Railway, Airlines and Steamship Clerks.